



Aneesh Chopra

Arlingtonian to Steer
Virginia's High Tech Frontier
By Andrew Noyes

Governor Tim Kaine has placed Aneesh Chopra at the helm as Virginia's new Secretary of Technology. We tracked the 33-year-old Arlington businessman down to see what he envisions his mission to be.

Neither technologist nor bureaucrat, an eager, intelligent Aneesh Chopra is prepared to make his mark on the Commonwealth as the state's new technology secretary. The 33-year-old Arlington resident has some big ideas on how 21st century technological solutions can help move Virginia forward in the business world and deliver a higher quality of life to residents from Rosslyn and Reston to Rocky Mount.

Northern Virginia has lured significant high-tech enterprise over the years; AOL, AT&T, Microsoft, IBM, Computer Associates and other major industry players have substantial presence here. That momentum must continue to thrive and spread throughout the state, says Chopra, who most recently served as the Advisory Board Company's managing director. He wants to bring technology jobs to "all four

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corners of Virginia—to Danville and southwest Virginia."

Part of that effort will be encouraging government and private sector partners to recruit top firms and help existing Virginia companies flourish. He mentions high-tech growth in Wise and Russell counties, where industry has "been actively working on the infrastructure necessary to recruit high-tech jobs." But the "single biggest lever to attracting jobs" to rural parts of the state is addressing workforce development, Chopra says. "Companies want to know: 'Can I employ the talent I need to do the job if we set up shop here versus there?'"

Expanding broadband access is also important to Chopra. Testing new technologies whose creators see the sense in sharing the rollout risks could be one way to go. "Less mature" technologies like broadband-over-powerline, satellite-based services and terrestrial networks hold promise, he says. "Who knows if they might be the answer" to closing gaps between high-speed internet haves and have-nots, Chopra adds.

In his campaign, Gov. Tim Kaine (D) stressed transportation as a chief component of his inaugural year. Chopra says he will see that Virginia does "everything in our power to surface innovative technology-based transportation ideas." The new administration also inherited former Gov. Mark Warner's (D) goal of widening access to health care while cutting costs through the Electronic Health Records Task Force, on which Chopra served. The goal is for everyone in the state to have an e-health record, he says.

As Kaine's technology point-man, Chopra will also work with the state Information Technologies Agency and the Center for Innovative Technology as well as the Arlington-based Homeland Security Institute, which advises the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the Chesapeake Nanotech Initiative that links thought leaders and researchers in

Virginia, Maryland and the District.

Chopra is deeply passionate about improving his community. "I've spent my whole life trying to find the right way to support my dream to be in public service," he says. He's also a self-admitted perfectionist. "I am relentless about execution and getting things done in almost every role I've had in my life. I hold myself to the highest standards and try to perform at and above expectations."

Those rules apply for Chopra's professional endeavors as well as his personal life.

Chopra and his wife, Rohini, a 28-year-old real estate financial analyst with Walker & Dunlop, love to explore their Northern Virginia neighborhood. They regularly dine on Italian food at Faccia Luna (2909 Wilson Blvd.), sample sushi at Café Asia (1550 Wilson Blvd.) and wrap up the evening by lounging at sleek, sultry Gua-Rapo (2039 Wilson Blvd.). When Independence Day rolls around, the duo makes a beeline for the Iwo Jima Memorial—"the best place to watch the fireworks from across the river."

Chopra met his wife, a longtime family friend, on a business trip to Chicago. After a long distance courtship, she left the Windy City for Washington when they got engaged. "She's the love of my life. She's beautiful and very talented and charismatic," Chopra says.

Aneesh Chopra, a Trenton, N.J. native, came to Washington in 1997 after graduating from Harvard University's prestigious Kennedy School of Government, but his parents emigrated from India many years before. His father came to the United States in 1966 to be an engineer when many of his peers were moving to America for graduate school or medical residencies, Chopra says. His father returned to India to marry and brought his bride to the U.S. in 1971. Chopra was born 11 months later.

His family obviously shares his work ethic. "My parents are professionals but like most Indian American families, they

sacrificed everything to ensure that I had a world-class education." As a child, Chopra's grandmother wouldn't let him leave the house to play outside until he had finished pages and pages of math homework, he recalls. "It was instilled from a very young age, that education was an incredibly high priority."

Chopra also embraces his heritage and is intimately involved in a group called TIE-D.C., which is the metropolitan area's chapter of a global network of Indus entrepreneurs. The organization, which has come to stand for "The Innovative Ecosystem," is committed to entrepreneurship as a means of giving back—not just to younger Indus Americans—but to the broader community in which we live, he explains.

Chopra says the premise is simple: "We've got to light a fire in our respective communities to promote entrepreneurship," Chopra says. TIE-DC accomplishes that by pairing successful mentors with ambitious young thinkers.

Many groups have hailed Chopra's selection for the job. The U.S.-India Political Action Committee praised Kaine for appointing Chopra, calling the occasion a "milestone achievement" for the Indian American community.

Despite his lack of a high-tech vocation, Chopra has solid credentials in using technologies to help solve socio-economic problems, an attribute Kaine found extremely attractive. Chopra succeeds Eugene Huang, a young official appointed by Gov. Warner in 2004, who was steeped in high-tech experiences, having co-founded a California-based internet firm, and served as a policy analyst at the FCC.

But Chopra is optimistic about his term in office. "I'll learn a lot along the way and take advice from people who know a lot more than I do," he says. "I'll do everything within my power to serve people of Virginia. I'm ecstatic. I look at that as an opportunity, not something to be afraid of."